

## Framework for School Districts to Host a Youth Summit



## Background

A statewide Youth Summit, held April 5, 2019, engaged about 350 students from across New Hampshire in meaningful discussion of issues of importance to them. Topics included mental health issues such as depression and suicide, eating disorders, substance use and pressures for success, as well as social issues, including gender and sexual identity, racial and ethnic diversity and bullying. Several strong key themes arose from those discussions:

- A desire for opportunities to continue to engage in meaningful, authentic discussions with others in their schools about issues of concern.
- The need for ongoing realistic, non-directive health education on diverse topics, such as mental health, gender and sexuality, substances, interactions/bullying and nutrition.
- Access to walk-in, moment-of-need health care, including mental health care, in their schools.
- Recognition of the value of trained peer supporters in addressing social and mental health issues.

The following framework addresses the students' interest in continuing to engage in meaningful discussions, to advance action on the challenges that are important to them and to bring additional students into the discussion.

## Goals for School-Based Summits

1. Provide an opportunity for all students to engage in meaningful discussion of issues that are important to them. In doing so, enhance recognition that:
  - a. Students are not alone in their experiences and feelings.
  - b. Sharing feelings and thoughts openly in a safe and supported environment is healthy and can bring people closer together.
  - c. Differing opinions and perspectives can be shared respectfully and result in better understanding and a greater sense of community.
2. Create conversations that may lead to meaningful change through activism on issues of concern.

## Steps to Develop School-Based Summits

1. Gain support of principal, counseling office, parent-teacher association (PTA) and any other key leadership for the Summit concept.
2. Bring together a planning committee which may include:
  - Youth Summit 2019 student facilitators: email Mary Forsythe-Taber ([mft@mih4u.org](mailto:mft@mih4u.org)) from the Makin' It Happen Coalition in the Manchester, NH region for a list of student facilitators near your school
  - Student leaders from different grades
  - Counseling office representative
  - Your regional Public Health Council representative - visit <https://nhphn.org> to find your local contact
3. Planning team meets regularly to:
  - Refine and affirm school-specific goals

- Select topics to be discussed
- Decide on the structure of the proposed discussions, including:
  - Schedule and timeline
  - Format
  - Proposed participants
- Consider and define what your follow-up to the Summit will be

### **Necessary Planning Decisions** (with suggested processes to be revised as needed for each school)

- Goals: review the general Summit goals above; revise as needed for your school
- Select topics
  - Survey student body and staff regarding what topics they feel are most important to:
    - Them personally
    - The school community generally
  - Based on survey, select 3-6 topics for discussion with the goal of each student participating in 2-3 discussions of interest (or all if time permits)
- Plan the discussions
  - Timing/sequence for discussions - possibilities:
    - Whole afternoon devoted to the Summit (preferred to create a sense of community and shared engagement)
    - One hour set aside on different days if needed (could name and celebrate the week or month to approximate the same sense of community engagement)
    - What will the time be traded for?
- Who will participate?
  - Suggest aiming for engaging all, perhaps with opt-out set up
    - For example: students are encouraged to attend and discuss, but can elect to attend a supervised study hall or complete a related reading assignment and produce a report or something similar as an alternative.
  - Mix of ages/grades/separate habitual groups in the discussion
- Who will lead?
  - Identify student facilitators
    - Host brief training for student facilitators to learn how to facilitate a discussion
    - See principles for facilitation (see below)
  - Identify faculty supports
    - Inform regarding support role, prepare as needed
- Confirm focal questions discussion (with reference to long-term goals)
  - Sample questions can be adjusted as appropriate for school (see below)
- Consider follow-up, refine following the Summit
  - Develop post Summit evaluation and feedback survey
  - Sample evaluation can be revised as needed (see below)
- Determine Summit next steps
  - Refer to evaluation findings
  - Consider ongoing optional “Let’s Talk” Group (to continue meaningful discussions on all or selected topics)
  - Consider ongoing group(s) to continue actions on issues of importance

The following tools can be provided to school districts or Public Health Councils that are interested. To request any of the items listed below contact Karen Borgstrom, Director of External Affairs, Dartmouth-Hitchcock: [karen.j.borgstrom@hitchcock.org](mailto:karen.j.borgstrom@hitchcock.org), (603) 653-1927.

- Sample survey to identify topics for discussion
- Principles for facilitation
- Suggested discussion questions and group process
- “Get people comfortable talking” exercises
- Links and resources on different topics
- List of content experts who spoke at the 2019 Youth Summit

To see the structure and speakers involved in the two-day 2019 Youth Summit, hosted by Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health and the Children’s Hospital at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, visit: [dhyouthsummit.com](http://dhyouthsummit.com).